

“Joseph Davidson: The Neglected” – Matthew 1:18-25

Originally written by Haddon Robinson

Performed by Jeff Foucart – 12/27/2009

It is Joseph Davidson. Many of you already know me. I have been hanging around Christmas for a long time. But I suspect you don't know me very well. See, sometimes I feel a bit like the father of the bride at the wedding. Nobody notices him but he has to pay for the whole affair.

I know you enjoy celebrating Christmas but Christmas cost me a great deal. Let me tell you a bit about myself.

See, my small claim to fame is that I happen to be a descendant of David, Israel's greatest king. That really isn't much to boast about. David lived a 1000 years before I was born and by the time I came along, there were hundreds, even thousands of descendants of David – yet, it was something I was proud of -- the same way some of you are proud to be Daughters of the American Revolution. You boast about tracing your family lineage back to people twelve generations ago, to folks who came over on the Mayflower. That is just like me with David.

When I lived, King David had long since died and his reign had lost its glory. We were living in moral and spiritual darkness. There were times when things were so dark, my country didn't even dare to dream. But I am telling you *my* story.

I grew up in the town of Bethlehem. It is a little town about seven miles south of the capital city of Jerusalem. It was really hard to make a living there. So, when I was a young man, I decided to go up north to the hill country, near the Lake of Galilee. I settled in the town of Nazareth. I am surprised some of you know Nazareth. It was just a nothing little town. It was so small, it was the butt of so many jokes. Some of my countrymen would say, 'Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?' I wondered myself if anything good or bad could come out of that place.

But I didn't go there because it was a great place to live. I went there to work my trade. I am a carpenter. That tells you something about me. I mean, carpenters are practical people. We are not poets or philosophers. I like working with things that I can handle and measure, cut and saw.

I enjoy working with wood. You know, there is a spirit in wood and cedar, oak, and pine. Some wood is as hard as metal and other wood is as pliable as clay but wood is an honest thing. Now, I understand that some of you have doors that are hollow in the middle. I don't want to insult you but you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. I like wood that is wood clear through, wood that has integrity. I like that in wood and I like that in people.

Oh, but the times were good for me in Nazareth. It was especially delightful then in Nazareth when I met Mary. She was about 15 ½ when we met, a wonderful girl and a wonderful woman. Before long, we were betrothed which is sort of like an engagement – only it is a whole lot more serious. It lasted a year or even longer and during that time families get to know each other and they work out a dowry. Not only that, they searched the records at the Temple in Jerusalem because it is possible in a country as compact as ours for near relatives to marry and not even know it.

Oh, but it was a time in which I came to love Mary, even more. She was a wonderful combination of a girl and a woman. There were times that she would laugh, that her eyes just danced with joy. It was ecstasy to be with her. As a woman, she was as solid as the pillars of the Temple. She was thoughtful and she pondered life. Not only that, she could give expression to her thoughts and songs. Some of her songs were absolutely magnificent.

That period of betrothal, that was a time in which I dreamed. I dreamt of building a house for Mary and for the children we would have. I dreamt of what life would be like with her. It is strange, isn't it? How quickly, almost over night, that your dreams can turn to nightmares and your best plans can be shattered.

I noticed that Mary had become quiet and withdrawn. One day, I asked her what was wrong and she told me she just couldn't talk about it. I had to go to Capernaum to work and while I was away, I wondered about her silence. I wondered if I had offended her in some way or if her family was displeased with me – or worse, if they found something at the Temple to indicate that we could not be married.

When I got back to Nazareth, I was beside myself. I asked Mary not to shut me out of her life but I was completely, completely unprepared for her answer. She looked right at me and started to cry and said, "I am pregnant." Of all the things that entered my mind, that one had never occurred to me. Pregnant? I had never been with her. Or, if not me, who? How could it have happened? How could it have happened without my knowing or even her family knowing? We had love. We had trust. We had plans and dreams.

I needed to ask all kinds of questions but I was afraid to hear the answers. When Mary finally answered me, it was like a slap in the face. She said that an angel of the Lord had appeared to her and told her, a 16-year old girl, living in a fifth-rate little village, that she was going to be the mother of Israel's Messiah. Then she said that she was still a virgin, that the Spirit of God had come upon her and planted a baby in her womb. I was furious! It was one thing for her to betray our love but it was another thing for her to treat me like a fool by telling me a story that bordered on blasphemy. I could not believe it. You wouldn't believe it. I wanted to lash out. I wanted to hurt her like she was hurting me.

Under the old law, it said that if a woman was caught in adultery, she should be stoned. I can understand that law now. Although we didn't practice it then, I wanted to somehow get back at her for what she had done to our love and to my faith and to my reputation. I am a righteous man and I try to live according to the Scriptures but I have a reputation in the community, who as soon as they found out that Mary was pregnant they would assume that I was the father and my reputation would be destroyed. I was furious! I was going to make it public. I was going to go before the elders at the gate and sever this relationship and explain that I was not responsible!

I couldn't do it. I loved Mary even though my trust was shattered. I thought I could not marry her but I wasn't going to expose her to public shame. So I decided to sever the thing quietly and make up some kind of story.

Mary knew she could not stay in Nazareth. She knew the caustic gossip of that community would be impossible to stand. So she decided to go south to the area of Hebron and live with her cousin Elizabeth and Zachariah her husband. They would give her a home and a place to stay. They would protect her. But after Mary left, I could not get her out of my mind. I tried to work at the bench but I could not pay attention to what I was doing. I tried to eat and I tried to sleep.

One night I had a dream and I dreamt I was walking through a dark place and suddenly up ahead there was this blinding light. In the center of that light, there was an angel. I was terrified. The angel said to me, "Joseph Davidson, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child she bears is at the Holy Spirit and you shall call His name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins."

When I awoke from that dream, I was elated. I had a message from heaven. I realized that Mary had told me the truth. I was so filled with joy that as soon as I could, I went down to Hebron and told Elizabeth and Zachariah what had happened and I apologized to Mary for doubting her word. I took her and we went back to Nazareth.

As soon as we could, we were married. I made her my wife. I swear to you that in all that time, I never touched her. A wise man has to know what time it is in life and I knew from that time forward that life would never be the same.

I also realized this was of God and that He would smooth the way. Even though I could anticipate difficulties, I was sure that since God was in it, troubles would not occur. I told you I'm a carpenter, didn't I, if not much of a theologian. I could not imagine how wrong I was because, you see, during Mary's ninth month, Caesar Augustus sent out a decree. He wanted a census taken for the purpose of taxation. That meant that all of us males had to go back to the place of our birth. [In your day, the census taker comes to you. That never occurred to Caesar Augustus.]

I knew I had to make the trip from Nazareth back to my hometown of Bethlehem but I didn't know if I should take Mary. But when I thought of their criticism and gossip in Nazareth, I felt that any risk we took was better than that. So, we made the trip – 3 days. It was a hard journey but when we got to Bethlehem, I knew there were people who would give us what we needed and relatives who would take us in. One thing I did not plan on was the crowd that had come because of the census. Oh, we got to Bethlehem but relatives had already taken in more people than they could handle.

The trip had caused Mary's pains to begin. I searched desperately for some lodging. I even searched camps where the poor people stayed but they were packed. Finally, desperate for some place, I found a cave at the edge of town. It was a place where a farmer kept his oxen but at least we were out of the elements.

Mary laid down on the straw because there was no place else. There was no bed. There was no board. There was nothing. I lit a fire to keep us warm but when the baby came, I didn't know what to do. I am a carpenter, remember. Mary had to be both midwife and mother. I severed the cord and cleaned the baby as best I could and I wrapped him in clothes and I laid him in the manger because the only other place would have been on the filth of the cattle floor.

I had all kinds of questions. If this wife of mine was highly favored of God, if this was something God had planned from years before, how do you explain the cave? How do you explain the dirt and the cattle and the loneliness? No one came from Jerusalem to celebrate the birth of our son. No one even came from Bethlehem. Oh, but there were those filthy shepherds who smelled like old wine. They came to the cave. They said they had heard an angel choir on the hillside. At least they came to see our baby boy. But other than them, we were completely alone. We felt the loneliness. Mary and I, we are not stone.

After the hubbub of the census had subsided, I decided we would stay in Bethlehem. I wasn't about to go back to Nazareth with all of its gossip and criticism. So we rented a house and I took what jobs I could.

After we were there a year or more, we had some visitors, some astrologers from beyond the rising sun, from Iran. They said they had seen a star and followed it to Jerusalem. They had gone to Herod, the half-breed king, and asked about the successor to his throne. Then they came further south to Bethlehem. Here was our boy, Jesus, just a toddler when these rich, learned men who weren't even Jewish, when they came in and saw Him, well, they fell down on their knees and they worshipped this toddler and they gave him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Then they left. I don't have to tell you how much we needed those gifts.

Not long afterwards, I was warned in another dream to take Mary and the child into Egypt. If it hadn't been for that gold and expensive perfume, we could not have survived there. We were aliens. We were strangers and we were on the run. They had no time for poor, Jewish carpenters. I saw that gold as a provision from God. We stayed in Egypt almost two years.

After Herod died, we came back. I wanted to settle in Bethlehem because of the relatives and all. But there was still political unrest so God directed us back to Nazareth. Here He is, the Creator of the entire universe and He sends us back to Nazareth, with all of its gossip and its raised eyebrows and its dirty jokes! I had all kinds of questions!

When I was young, I swore that if just once in my lifetime I were to see an angel, just one angel like our forefathers had seen, I swore I would never doubt. I would always believe. Well, I had that dream and I saw that angel and it was vivid and it was real to me. But there are times when I wondered if I so desired Mary that somehow in my dream I had made this come to pass.

To be honest with you, Jesus didn't seem that much like a Savior to the world to me. Oh, He was good and He was obedient but when He was an infant, Mary fed Him from her breast. You have seen that hymn, 'the poor little Jesus, no crying he made.' Let me tell you, He cried. When we were back in Nazareth, He came to the table along with the rest of the children and He didn't perform any miracles. When He fell in the streets of Nazareth and scraped His knee, it bled. I would hold Him on my lap to tell Him stories and He would fall asleep. He wasn't that different.

But when he was 12, we went down to Jerusalem for a feast day. The relatives and friends all went. When we were on our way back, we had gone a day and a half journey or so, we lost Him. We thought He was back with the relatives but they didn't know where He was. I had lost the Son of God! I didn't know what to do so we retraced our steps. We climbed the mountain back to Jerusalem and there He was, sitting there, talking with the leaders of the people, asking them questions. I said to Him, "Look, you have driven us nuts! We didn't know where you were!" He said to me, "Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?" Well, that sounds good in church but when you hear it coming from a 12-year old, you don't quite know what to do. My point is, He wasn't that much different.

I wondered, oh I wondered, but I could never express my doubts to Mary. I could never let her know I didn't have faith enough to shout down all my questions. I couldn't talk about it with the folks in the village. They had much more earthly explanations for Jesus' birth. In fact, He never lived it down. There were times when they would throw it in His face. 'We were not born of fornication', they would say. 'You have two fathers but we have one.' 'You have a real father and then you have Joseph.' They

never let Him or me live it down. I certainly wasn't going to bring it up to them. I just wrestled with it myself.

But one thing I did have was a passage in the Old Testament. Eight hundred years before I came along, a prophet by the name of Isaiah said that a virgin would conceive and would have a son and call his name Emmanuel, which means God With Us. It was just a sentence but I held on to that scrap of Scripture for dear faith. It was really all I had.

Some of you out there have a faith like Mary's. It is obedient and it is strong. It is rich and it is devout. Let me tell you, you are God's special people.

But some of you, I think, are more like me. We are practical people. We live in a world of cause and effect. We like things we can touch and feel and measure. We find it hard to believe that faith has its merits. After I was confronted by that angel, there were times I thought I would never doubt again but there were times the whole thing didn't make sense to me.

Some of you are like that. You believe your doubts and you doubt your beliefs. Sometimes you wonder if you ever believed at all. I understand. It is just that when I face those questions, I had to come down on the side of faith. I faith-ed it through, in spite of my questions and my hurts. I had to trust when I didn't feel like trusting.

That is what God used. I, Joseph Davidson, put my thumbprint upon Jesus Christ. I taught Him to be a carpenter. He was so creative. He could build an oxen yoke and it was perfect and so easy to bear. In fact, folks in the village referred to Him as the Carpenter. I taught Him that. I put my thumbprint upon Him. But of course He was the Savior of the world and He put his thumbprint upon my soul. But it wasn't easy. It is just that when I thought I knew what God wanted me to do, I did it. I had faith enough for that.

So, that is my story. I thought I would share it with you. I know you want to celebrate Christmas and worship again the birth of Christ and you ought to. But I wanted to let you know that I had something to do with that. When God sent His Boy to earth, He put Him into the care of this carpenter, who sometimes believed his doubts and doubted his beliefs, but faith-ed it through. I am not the main character of this story but when you celebrate, you might want to remember that when God wanted someone to take care of His Boy, He chose Joseph Davidson, a carpenter who believed the best he could. You might want to think about that.

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Ray Anderson

In less than six minutes, you could find and read the passages where Joseph was involved, most of

which are part of the story of the birth of Jesus. There is the flight to and from Egypt, and a couple of visits to the Jerusalem Temple. About 12 years of life are summarized in less than six minutes of reading.

We are familiar with his story. We know how it ends. But Joseph lived it from the inside. He didn't live long enough to hear Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount. He didn't see Him heal a blind man. Jesus did not raise him from the dead but he had faith. He held on to the words of an angel visiting him in a dream and to an 800-year old prophecy about a virgin giving birth to a special child. So, with what seemed to be very little concrete evidence, given by a God whom Joseph was trained to trust and obey, Joseph exercised faith.

Faith simply put is this. It is taking God at His Word. It is taking the character of God's integrity, His faithfulness, His love and grace, and putting it on the balanced scale. On the other side placing our circumstances, our concerns, our emotions, our fears, even our doubts and though the evidence seems to weigh heavily on this side, faith chooses to take God at His Word. Like Joseph, we must individually choose to live by faith. I can encourage your faith by pointing out to you the character of God and you can encourage mine. I can even discourage your faith, pointing out the reasons why you should doubt and you could discourage mine. But we must make a faith decision to trust God in the circumstances of our lives or we trust in our own efforts to get through those circumstances. Joseph's story encourages us to trust God, in spite of our circumstances, in spite of our doubts, in spite of our bent to be self-sufficient. Choose faith and you choose life, a life that is an adventure with God.

If you are here today or in this Christmas season and you are unsure of how to have faith in a God you have not seen, who has not visited you in a dream, then we want to help you with that. It is the most important faith decision you can make to put your trust in Christ Jesus as your Savior. We sing about a Savior is given to us who is Christ the Lord. That Savior is Jesus and He can save us from the penalty for our sins. If you are wrestling with that kind of faith decision in this season, we want to help you. It is one of the most important things we can help you with.

We have a little booklet down front and in the lobby which are available to you, entitled "Would You Like to Know God Personally". We would encourage you to take one if you like, to read it. Then you can feel free to call one of the pastors at our church office and we would be glad to talk to you about this so that you can come to faith in the Savior that we celebrate in this season.

I hope you had a merry Christmas.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

What an incredible thing it is that You would come down, You would send Your Son to come and be obedient to the point of the cross, but to be obedient to be born in such humble means, to grow up among us, to reveal God to us, that we might know the living God. Thank you, Jesus. We entrust our lives, ourselves, our souls to You. In the wonderful name of the Savior, Jesus. Amen.